



Council of Economic Advisors
Town Hall
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Minutes
Council of Economic Advisors
Wednesday, January 6, 2020 9:00 a.m.
Zoom Meeting ID 840 2622 0888
Adopted February 10, 2021

Members Present: Stuart Agler, Adam Block, Tina Burgos, Glen Cammarano, Bill Day, Anne Marie Dowd, Lise Elcock, , Maurice Handel, Robert Hentschel, David Montgomery, Rick Putprush, Mathew Talcoff, Michael Wilcox

Members Absent: Virginia Fleisher, Adam Meixner

Others Present: Amy Haelsen, Economic Development Manager; Timothy McDonald, Director of Public Health Services; Lee Newman, Director of Planning and Community Development

1. **Introduction and Roll Call** - Adam Block, Chair, opened the meeting at 9:00 a.m. He announced that this meeting of the Council of Economic Advisors was being held remotely, consistent with current state regulations, and was being recorded.
2. **Minutes of December 2, 2020** - Moe Handel moved to adopt the minutes of the December 2, 2020 meeting. Rick Putprush seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.
3. **COVID19 State of Emergency Update** – Tim McDonald reported that COVID numbers have risen nationwide and in Massachusetts. Needham is not quite at its peak in terms of average daily cases, but it's close. The town peaked a week and a half prior and he expects when this week's data is released the town will hit a new peak. Needham is in the yellow while a significant majority of the rest of the populated parts of the state are in the red. Comparatively speaking Needham is in a good place but he's not happy with where the numbers are. Mr. McDonald believes that unfortunately a lot of people did not heed the directives and guidance on how to celebrate the holidays safely. A significant number of people traveled and gathered with extended family or friends which is contributing to the overall spike in numbers. Governor Baker implemented some additional restrictions on businesses that had a modest effect on Needham because we don't have the entertainment venues or theaters that had capacity reduced significantly. Mr. McDonald reported that vaccination planning is going slower than anticipated. Needham has not yet received any vaccines but anticipates that the town will receive them later in the week to begin distributing early next week. Needham will be leading the effort to vaccinate public safety staff for the towns of Dover and Medfield but received only about 80% of the vaccine the town requested to vaccinate first responders in our town and these other two communities. The state has committed to following up to provide additional doses. Mr. McDonald reported that the

public health department is fielding many inquiries about vaccines for non-Covid-facing healthcare staff including chiropractors, physical therapists, dentists, etc. and reported that right now he doesn't have a lot of information about how that's going to work but is hopeful that the town will be given vaccines for them. Needham has been planning for this for a while and has added several per diem nurses to support these efforts. Following vaccinations of these groups in Phase I will be vaccinations for those in Phase II who are individuals with two or more comorbidities or are high risk because of age. It also includes teachers and early education workers, critical workers in transit, grocery stores, utilities, food service, agriculture, sanitation, and public works. This will cover a significant percentage of the business community, as well as adults 65 years and older. He added that the town will try to arrange for people who meet these criteria to schedule their appointments as soon as possible but that given the lack of information available from the state at the moment there may not be a lot of advance notice. The vaccine does require a second dose with the Moderna vaccine requiring the second dose 28 days after initial vaccination. He added that his department is trying to schedule people for both days so they can get their second dose within the necessary timeframe. Mr. McDonald shared that his department, in collaboration with Public Information Officer Cindy Gonzalez, has launched a public awareness campaign. The messaging is featured on sandwich board signs and wraps on trash barrels around town as well as large banners to be installed on fences at parks and playgrounds. The simple messaging features a theme of 'follow the rules now so we can have lots of fun later'. There are also social media ads targeting youth to emphasize the point that they might feel that they are safe but what about all these other people in your life who might be vulnerable. The messaging asks them to please think of them when they're making their decisions. The ads will be distributed later this month and are being done in response to feedback from the public and the business community related to reminding residents about their responsibilities and a desire to return to normal more quickly.

4. Challenges and solutions

- a. **Retail** – Ms. Burgos reported that holiday sales for her retail business were very strong and that she had a record-setting year. She shared that for retailers who were able to figure out how to make it through last March, April and May and strategize how to make it through the busy fourth quarter with holiday sales, it was quite a strong season. Given the challenges of the last year, Ms. Burgos believes that a business had to have strong legs to stand on before the closures happened last spring and added that unfortunately because so many businesses closed it created less competition. She added that the increased awareness of the importance of shopping locally had an impact on how well local retailers did during the holidays. Lise Elcock concurred that the feedback she received from retailers was that the community rallied around the local businesses to support them. She reported that the Needham 100 Day Challenge campaign, which created a great deal of awareness on social media and wrapped up at the end of December, had great success. The Chamber's Needham Business Alliance will be meeting next week to discuss how to continue the momentum to rally around supporting small businesses.
- b. **Office** – Mike Wilcox reported that in Needham the level of activity in the office environment remains about the same. His company has seen some activity with new leases including a new family law practice relocating from Newton to one of their properties in Needham Crossing. He has observed that financial services, insurance, and law practices appear to be consistently looking for new space, while some of his high-tech tenants are leaving due to consolidating offices, reducing office space, or

relocating to another area. The lab sector, particularly in Cambridge, remains strong and things in downtown Boston continue to be quiet.

- c. **Industrial** - Rick Putprush reported that industrial and warehouse continues to be a very active market. Bob Hentschel added that lab space continues to dominate the headlines and supply is not keeping up with demand.
- d. **Miscellaneous** – Moe Handel shared that the Select Board has extended free two-hour on-street parking in Needham Center and Needham Heights through the end of June at which time they will reassess the demand for parking. Ms. Elcock announced the Newton Needham Chamber will now be representing businesses in the town of Wellesley as the Wellesley Chamber is disbanding. Bill Day shared that Needham Bank has returned to appointment only banking for its customers because of Covid. Matt Talcoff announced that the second round of Payroll Protection Program loans is imminent.

5. **Economic Development Manager Report** – Amy Haelsen reported that she continues to be in regular contact with the small business community to check in to see how they're doing and to communicate relevant and helpful info. on resources and funding opportunities. She is distributing new materials such as window decals for the public health campaign for Covid which Mr. McDonald spoke about which gives her a chance to visit with businesses in person. Ms. Haelsen shared that she shared info. with the small businesses in Needham on the latest round of state funding which includes \$668 million for small business grants being facilitated through the Mass. Growth Capital Corporation. Under the program, businesses may receive up to \$75,000 – or 3 months of operating expenses - to help cover payroll, mortgages, debt, and other bills to help them through the difficult months ahead. The funds would come in the form of grants, which would not need to be repaid. Priority Categories for funding are:

- Restaurants, bars, caterers, and food trucks that collect and remit meals tax
- Indoor Recreation or Entertainment Establishments
- Gyms or Fitness Centers
- Personal Services
- Independent pharmacies
- Event Support Companies - primary source (more than 50%) of revenue is event-related
- Independent Retailers - Businesses with brick and mortar locations that collect and remit sales tax

Ms. Haelsen added that she also shares with the local businesses information and links to free resources and webinars available from the Center for Women in Enterprise, the Small Business Administration, the International Downtown Group, Small Business Development Center - which provide technical assistance on topics such as applying for the new state grants. Ms. Haelsen added to reports from Ms. Burgos and Ms. Elcock that the feedback from the small business community on year-end activity was very positive with many of them exceeding their expectations for sales. They attribute this to increased awareness of shopping locally through campaigns such as the Needham 100 Day Challenge and Small Business Saturday. Ms. Haelsen organized eleven retailers in Needham Center to stay open late on Thursdays until 7 pm from mid-November through Christmas and recruited seven restaurants to participate in cross-promotional activities for this effort as well. Unfortunately the last late Thursday evening on December 17 was canceled because of a snowstorm but feedback on this effort was positive with several retailers reporting increased sales on the late

nights they were open. Ms. Haelsen has connected with a contact of Anne Marie Dowd's at Mass Development to inquire what types of resources may be available for Needham overall and she continues to attend a bi-weekly zoom meeting with economic development directors from about twenty different towns and cities in the Greater Boston area. The informal group shares best practices, discusses solutions and brainstorms on common challenges they're facing. She shared the news that the retail stores Pollywogs and Mostly Gray in Needham Center are now closed. She has an inventory of the vacant street level retail space throughout town and is reaching out to the owners of these commercial properties to inquire about any interest they are receiving from prospective tenants and to explore the possibility of displaying work from local artists in the windows to make the storefronts look more appealing and less empty.

6. **2021 CEA Priorities** – Mr. Block is looking for feedback from CEA members on the draft priorities that were shared prior to the meeting (attached). One of the priorities includes the reconstitution of the CEA into sub-committees which he believes, along with Vice Chair Ms. Dowd, will have a bigger impact on the group's ability to support the business community. Mr. Block asked members to indicate their preference for a sub-committee assignment by reaching out to him or Ms. Haelsen.
7. **Planning and Development Department Business Permits Issued** – Lee Newman reported that at the January 4 Planning Board meeting the Board finalized the approval for Boston Children's Hospital (BCH) and she expected the special permit will be filed within the next week. As part of the Board's decision there was some traffic mitigation that BCH agreed to. Specifically, they'll be making some adjustments to the signal timing at the Kendrick and 3rd Avenue intersection as well as doing some relocation of the signal heads at that location. They will also be giving the town a donation of \$30,000 for some additional improvements at that intersection. Additionally, BCH committed to doing some work on 3rd Avenue to better delineate the right-turn from 3rd Avenue on to Kendrick Street which is also a condition of their permit. The town will also be receiving an additional \$130,000 for additional INI mitigation and this will be provided when the occupancy permit for the project is issued. The Avery Manor Project, the redevelopment of the former Carter Mill building in Avery Square, is moving forward. The developer has had a review of their draft site plans by the fire department and engineering department in anticipation of filing their application with the planning board. A new business is looking at the space formerly occupied by Stacy's Juicebar on Highland Avenue and will need to apply for a special permit from the Zoning Board of Appeals.

Ms. Newman also provided an update on Highway Commercial 1. The proposed zoning changes are advancing according to schedule. The goal is to have this on the warrant for the Annual Town Meeting in May. She continues to work with Studio Enee, the consultant to develop the urban design plan for the parcel. The planning board will review these draft renderings at its meeting next week. A community meeting will be held on February 3 at 7:15 pm to present updated zoning changes based on previous community feedback. Following this meeting the zoning will be finalized and she anticipates holding hearings on the zoning proposal in March to have it be on the warrant for the Annual Town Meeting. There will be significant outreach efforts to the community to ensure that people are aware of the meeting. Ms. Newman also shared that she has had preliminary conversations with a developer regarding the redevelopment of the former Hillcrest Gardens site at 888 Great Plain Avenue into a mixed-use development which would require a rezoning. The Center

Business District zoning district would need to be extended to include this parcel. Housing as a singular use would not require re-zoning.

8. Other Business – Mr. Handel inquired how we might better recruit minority-owned businesses to town and access state programs to support them.
9. Adjournment Roll Call - the meeting was adjourned at 10:20 am.